Ramazan bazaars no cheaper than open market

By Shaukat Ali

LAHORE, Jan 1: The special price control committees set up by the Punjab government to keep rates of essential articles from soaring during Ramazan seem to have lost their grip on managing the prices' affair within first ten days of the holy month.

Sore part of the prices episode is the unstable rates of some of the urgently needed common utility items even at the specially created Ramazan bazaars.

This correspondent on Friday visited a number of Ramazan bazaars only to find that either the prices of fruit, vegetables, meat and eggs fixed at the start of the month have shot up or there is hardly any difference between prices at these points and the open market.

The chicken price which was fixed at Rs 50 per kg by the government openly ranged between Rs 55 and Rs 60 at the Model Town bazaar. At other bazaars eggs which the government promised to make available at Rs 27 per dozen were in most cases not being sold and where they were available their rate was Rs 30 per dozen or above.

Apple (golden) which on Ramazan 1 were available for Rs 25 are now selling at Rs 28 or more in these bazaars. Banana price has also moved up from Rs 14 per dozen to Rs 18.

Date, perhaps in highest demand, are dearer by Rs 5 per kg from Rs 30 within a week.

Most shopkeepers are not selling ghee at the government fixed rate of Rs 55 per kg but taking an extra profit of Rs 2 to 3.

Peas are selling at the same rate of Rs 12 per kg at the Ramazan bazaars as they are available at the regular outlets in the open market. The prices of potato, cabbage, carrot, onion and ginger are by and large the same showing hardly any noticeable difference in the Ramazan bazaars and outside open markets.

Some of the bazaars, like the one for the Faisal Town area near LDA flats, seem to have been set up half-heartedly. At this bazaar there are hardly six to seven vendors selling a very limited number of items and that too, in most cases, at prices not much different from the open market.

No official of the district price control committee is available there to give any explanation. As a result, people are seen shopping from the regular markets at exorbitant rates.

In the meantime the divisional price control committee seems totally indifferent to an extraordinary increase in the rate of cooking oil supplied in the tin of 5 kg.

Last month the tin was available at Rs 305 which on Friday was dearer at Rs 345 - Rs 69 per kg.

"There may be some difference between the government rate of Rs 55 per kg and the variety sold in 5 kg tin packing due to certain reasons involving packaging cost etc but by no way this difference should be so yawning — Rs 14 per kg", a ghee dealer observed.

Even the wheat flour, which the government repeatedly claimed as was being sold at the retail markets for Rs 6 per kg, is being openly marketed by some leading brand names at Rs 7.20 per kg.

The chakki atta, which is supposed to be available for Rs 7 per kg is being sold at Rs 8 per kg.

It was worth noticing during a round of Ramazan bazaars on Thursday that atta was missing at many points.

When contacted, the authorities concerned with the Ramazan prices argued that due to heavy fog during past many days some logistic problems were occurring for articles like fruit, vegetables and eggs. Thus causing their supply problem in the cities.

"Prices will come to their normal level soon as supply position improves", a senior official said.